

Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

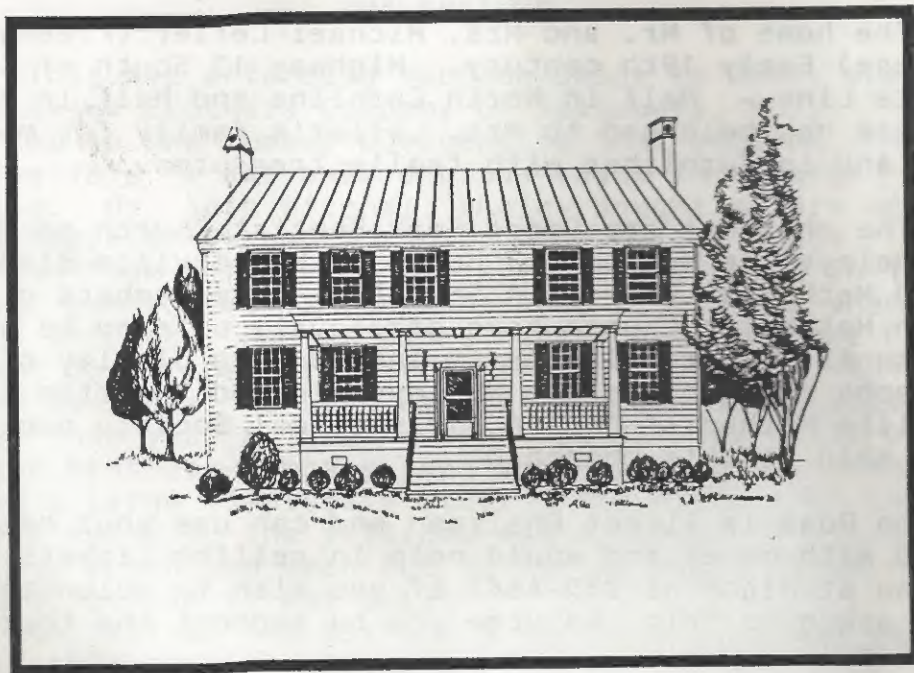
December 1987

HAVE YOU PAID YOUR DUES?

\$10.00 - Family
\$ 6.00 - Individual

Consider a membership as a Christmas gift!!

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Freeman/State Line House

Candlelight Tour - Our Eleventh Annual Candlelight Tour will be held on Sunday, December 6th from 1 - 6:00 P.M. (Churches 2 - 6) in Whaleyville and Somerton. We're opening three churches and four homes. As usual the homes will be ready for the holiday season decorated in the traditional style. The price of the tickets is \$6.00 for a block ticket. An individual house admission is \$2.00.

The following will be open -

* Home of Mr. and Mrs. Taylor Davis (old Methodist parsonage) C. 1895. 404 Whaleyville Blvd. - This charming small home is typical of many of the houses in Whaleyville as this was

built during the period when the lumber business was a part of Whaleyville's economy.

* Home of Mr. and Mrs. Franklin P. Marzullo, III (Broken Wing Farm) Early twentieth century. 7100 Whaleyville Blvd. - This typical early twentieth century farmhouse holds surprises inside. Also open will be the guest house and herb garden of the gate house.

* The home of Mrs. John Goodman Arthur (Washington Smith House) Late 18th or early 19th century. 8440 Arthur Drive - This house as well as the one across the street were built by Washington Smith who was a prosperous land owner and owner of the tavern in Somerton where Lafayette stopped in 1825.

* The home of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Lefler (Freeman/State Line House) Early 19th century. Highway 13 South of Suffolk at the State Line - Half in North Carolina and half in Virginia, this house has belonged to Mrs. Lefler's family for more than a century and is furnished with family treasures.

* The churches are Great Fork Baptist Church on Great Fork Road, Whaleyville Methodist Church on Whaleyville Blvd., and Somerton Methodist Church in Somerton. The members of the Somerton Methodist Church have graciously offered to serve refreshments. There will be an interesting display of old photographs relating to the Whaleyville and Somerton areas at the Whaleyville Methodist Church. Historical Society publications will be sold at this church.

Lynn Rose is Ticket Chairman and can use your help if you are good with money and would help in selling tickets. Please call Lynn at night at 255-4663 if you wish to volunteer. If you are not asked to help, we urge you to support the tour with your attendance.

DIRECTIONS: Take Highway 13 South from downtown Suffolk. The Whaleyville Methodist Church, the Davis House, the Marzullo House and the Lefler House are on Highway 13. Signs will be placed in front of each tour house. Whaleyville is approximately 20 minutes from downtown Suffolk. The other tour attractions are in sight of Highway 13 and directions to these can be obtained from the aforementioned houses.

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The following information is from a booklet published by the Nansemond River Power Squadron and the Suffolk Bicentennial

Commission for FLAG DAY in 1976. The information was written by Major Wilbur E. McClenny (1875-1950). Major McClenny was described as "one of the South's most noted church, family, and regional historian." He was a native of Nansemond County. His sections on Somerton and Whaleyville read as follows:

SOMERTON

"This was a country village prior to 1672 when it was visited by the Rev. George Fox and his traveling companion, William Edmundson on their tour of Virginia and North Carolina. It was then known as Summertown, and the only remaining Friends' Church in the county while several miles away is still known as Somerton Friends' Meeting House.

"(Foot Note: This village is not to be confounded with a small village several miles southeast of it on the Virginia-North Carolina line known as Sumner Town, a map of which was extant in 1863 in possession of the Federal troops.)

"About 1691, a chapel of ease was built there from a bequest given by Capt. Hugh Campbell of Nansemond river, in order that the people of that section might have a lay reader to conduct services for the people. A small creek on the west side of the Nansemond still is known as Campbell's Creek. From the date the chapel was built it continued in use until the time of the Revolutionary War. During the time there was so much discussion regarding the location of the North Carolina-Virginia line, it was visited often by surveying parties and astronomers to locate the exact spot where the line should be, and to question the remnants of the Indian tribes that dwelt in that vicinity as to which was the correct names of the different rivers flowing into the Chowan. When the line was finally run in 1728 it was found that it was about two miles in Virginia.

"Being one of the main highways from Virginia and North Carolina brought it into much prominence in the early days of the colonies, many of the pioneers of the latter colony passed over the 'Old Somerton Road' to find their new homes in North Carolina. Trade grew at the village and in 1832 it was on the stage route from Norfolk to Fayetteville, N.C., and there was a direct road from Somerton to Smithfield, Va. It was then, 1833, a post office, or post village.

"Some of her citizens were in the Continental Army in 1776-1781, it was visited in February, 1825, by General Lafayette on his tour, and it was there that he was met by a delegation of prominent citizens of

Murfreesboro, N.C. on his tour of that state. It continued to prosper until the war of 1861-65, and for many years after it was a place of trade, but with the coming of the railroads, first the Jackson Brothers railroad, and later the Norfolk & Carolina, now the Atlantic Coast Line, it became isolated and the trade went to the more convenient shipping points, Whaleyville and Drum Hill, N.C.... "The Methodists under Bishop Asbury established a church in the vicinity as early as 1801, at first it was known as Haslett's, and later it took the name of Somerton, and still later it was moved into the village."

WHALEYVILLE

"This was a farming section prior to 1847, when the Jackson Brothers Company of Salisbury, Md., embarked in the lumber business in that section. As late as 1876 it was only a cross roads in a large opening. Mr. Seth Mitchell Whaley bought a farm and moved there in December, 1877. The narrow guage railroad from Suffolk to Whaleyville was built in 1876 to haul the lumber to the Nansemond river from whence it was shipped. Messrs James Parker and Clarence F. Norment built the first store there. Up until 1884 the lumber business had been carried on with small mills, but in that year a large modern sawmill was built by Jackson Brothers Company, and soon Jackson & Company opened a large commissary store. The place then began to grow rapidly, the railroad was extended to bring in the logs which had been cut as far as eight miles from the mill before it was built.

"In 1887-88 the Norfolk & Carolina Railroad was built, this passing near the village, and soon the narrow gauge railroad was abandoned, and the new road which is now the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad was used to transport lumber and logs to and from the mill.

"Whaleyville continued to grow with a large trade with the farmers of the surrounding country. The M.E. Church (South) was organized in 1884 in the village. A Masonic Lodge was organized. Great Fork, a Baptist Church, organized in 1833 by the Rev. John Harrell is near. The Bank of Whaleyville was opened March 20, 1907, now one of the strongest country banks in the section. The district high school was built there in 1915 and stands high, her graduates having made good at the different institutions of higher learning.

"In 1919 Jackson Brothers Company began to move their lumber operations from Whaleyville and since that

time the village has continued to depend and develop the trade with the surrounding country, having cotton gins and shops....."

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At our October meeting an excellent program was presented by Mr. Cary Carson of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and Mr. Nicolas Luccetti and Mrs. Blythe Staub of the James River Institute for Archeology. They spoke about the Woodward-Jones dig. This is at the site of a 1716 house which stood in the Driver area of the City on property now owned by Dr. Lloyd March.

The Historical Society is assisting with the bookkeeping for the dig. The first phase of the \$30,000.00 project has been privately funded. In fact, a total of \$20,000.00 has been pledged or given. Additional funding will be needed to complete the project.

This site is particularly interesting to archeologists because this was the home of an average planter - the kind who populated most of Virginia - not the very wealthy planters such as the ones along the James River. While the latter sites are easier to find, the former have heretofore gone unstudied because virtually none of the small houses remain. This 1716 house was discovered inside a late 19th or early 20th century farmhouse which was being demolished for development. The condition of even the newer portion of the house was such that none of the house could be saved. But the site can be studied and the story told by the artifacts can be shared with present-day Virginians; through an agreement with the Board of Riddick's Folly, the articles recovered will be exhibited there.

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BEST WISHES TO ALL FOR A GLORIOUS HOLIDAY SEASON!